

## ***NEWS RELEASE***

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APRIL 14, 2005

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### **DeNUCCI SAYS PROBLEMS CONTINUE IN DSS FOSTER CARE MANAGEMENT**

State Auditor Joe DeNucci reported today that the Department of Social Services (DSS) still faces many troubling issues, including continued problems with the licensing of foster homes, criminal checks for foster care providers, and the integrity of the data in the computerized system it uses to monitor foster care placements.

DeNucci's audit determined that DSS has taken some corrective measures since a report last year that disclosed a high error rate in the agency's database tracking system known as FamilyNet. However, the new audit found that DSS still has not adequately addressed problems identified in the prior report.

"These problems have been caused in large part by staff reductions at DSS in recent years," said DeNucci. "However, state government has a responsibility to protect the 10,000 children living in foster or group homes. It is absolutely essential that DSS has both the resources it needs and updated and accurate information available to ensure that these kids are being placed in safe homes."

DeNucci's audit findings showed that:

- DSS's monthly Family Resource Report, compiled from FamilyNet data to monitor foster care providers and criminal background checks, had a 52 percent error rate. The errors included missing date information; inaccurate dates in the system; and overdue annual reassessments, including criminal background checks.
- DSS did not perform timely re-evaluations of CORI checks for foster care providers. One CORI check was completed 44 months after it was due to be completed. In addition, DSS's monthly reports of contracted foster care providers disclosed 133 providers with overdue or blank CORI records.

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- DSS is continuing to place children in foster homes without completing proper licensing requirements. A total of 708 children were placed in foster homes prior to the home being licensed. This lack of proper licensing could result in children being placed in an unsafe environment. It also does not comply with DSS policy and has resulted in ineligible claims for federal reimbursement.
- A review of DSS open fair appeal hearing requests of department decisions noted that 3,637 of 4,817 open requests for a hearing received from 1995 to August, 2004 had not been scheduled by the Legal Department within the 90 days required by DSS regulations. DSS attributed this backlog to a reduction in the number of hearing officers.
- DSS could not locate the legal records to document judicial determinations for three of 25 cases selected for review. As a result, these cases were ineligible for federal reimbursement.

In their response, DSS officials agreed with DeNucci's recommendations and said they are taking steps to monitor and improve CORI compliance and licensing requirements and approvals.

In other areas, DeNucci said DSS has taken some corrective actions to strengthen its inventory controls, in accordance with the State Comptroller's regulations, to ensure that its property is protected against loss, theft or misuse. DeNucci said DSS has also taken corrective action to comply with the Comptroller's regulations regarding the certification of its payroll expenditures.

"I am encouraged that the Department of Social Services has begun to address some of the problems cited in my last report," concluded DeNucci. "However, more work needs to be done to ensure the protection of foster children under the state's supervision."